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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER BLASTS RAJAPAKSA GOVERNMENT IN
BRIEFING TO DIP CORPS

REF: COLOMBO 841

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a June 13 briefing to the diplomatic corps, Opposition Leader Wickremesinghe criticized the Rajapaksa government for being "at war with the LTTE, the international community, and with Sri Lankan values." He said the UNP party would soon start a campaign to bring the failures of the government to the attention of Sri Lankans around the country. The UNP has decided to press the SLFP and its coalition partners to formulate a government proposal in the All Party Representative Committee. The Ambassador expressed concern that by insisting on a government proposal, the UNP was seeking to change the APRC terms of reference and risking a new dispute that would further delay APRC deliberations and lead to a further deterioration of conditions in the country. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Chairman of the UNP Party Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ravi Karunanayake began by explaining that the UNP had decided to begin meeting with and briefing the diplomatic community on a regular basis, since the reports of diplomats play an important role in shaping host government policies. In a clear jab to recent government criticism of members of the diplomatic corps and the UN, Karunanayake lauded the diplomatic corps and thanked them for their efforts.

Down the Road to a Failed State

¶3. (C) Opposition Leader Wickremesinghe told the gathering that Sri Lanka has a President and a ruling family that is out of touch, isolated in the international community, and "taking Sri Lanka down the road of a failed state". He said the government had gone to war with the LTTE with the promise

that it would win quickly, which had not happened. Instead, he said, the LTTE is stronger, and it has deployed a new air capability with a night flight capacity that the Sri Lankan Air Force does not have. The LTTE has bogged down the Sri Lankan Army offensive in Thoppigala in the east and broke through the forward defense line near Omathai for a short time recently. Now, continued Wickremesinghe, the government says it needs to recruit 50,000 more troops and three more years to defeat the LTTE.

14. (C) Ranil was withering in his criticism of the government's performance on human rights, citing continued abductions and the recent comments of Defense Secretary Rajapaksa that "anything is fair" in the war on terrorism (ref). Turning with a smile to the Ambassador, he told the gathering "we have an ugly American...and that is Gothabaya Rajapaksa". Wickremesinghe detailed the actions the UNP had taken in Parliament, but said the campaign now would move out into the country. He concluded by saying the Rajapaksa government is at war with the LTTE, the international community, and with Sri Lankan values.

Government Must Table APRC Proposal

15. (C) Ranil briefly referred to a statement that the UNP had issued earlier in which the party informed the All Party Representative Committee of the UNP's decision to press the SLFP and its coalition partners to formulate a government proposal "to make the APRC discussions meaningful." Once this basic agreement is reached and made known then further contribution by the opposition will become appropriate and

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relevant, Ranil maintained. Once the press had been asked to leave, Ranil opened the floor asking for frank comments from the diplomatic community.

16. (C) The Ambassador took the floor to ask a question about the UNP position in the APRC. Noting that he was speaking personally, since he had not yet had a chance to brief his government, the Ambassador told the opposition leader that the US shares concerns about the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka. We also believe that the best way to stop the fighting, human rights abuses and new displacements of people is to resume peace negotiations on the basis of a credible devolution proposal that the APRC was now seeking to craft. The Ambassador expressed concern that by insisting on a government proposal, the UNP was in effect asking for a change in the terms of reference (TOR) of the APRC (since previously only individual parties had been asked to submit proposals). By insisting on such a change the UNP risked igniting a new TOR debate within the APRC, which would result in further delays and thereby provide space for further deterioration of conditions inside Sri Lanka. Since the APRC had agreed to proceed on the basis of the APRC Chairman's report, this saved the UNP and SLFP from having to propose politically sensitive changes themselves. The Ambassador concluded by urging the UNP to be as flexible as possible and for all parties to put aside partisan differences for the sake of the country. Wickremesinghe did not answer the question about whether the UNP was delaying the APRC by insisting on a government proposal, preferring instead to maintain that it was important for the President to make a commitment.

Comment

17. (C) The UNP continues to hope that it will be able to bring down the government sometime in the fall. Septel will analyze whether we and others believe this will be possible to do. This partisan stalemate is the latest of many political disputes that have hampered the development of a political solution to Sri Lanka's conflict for more than 25 years. Post will continue to push for all sides to put aside

their differences now so that the country can seize the opportunity afforded by the APRC process.

BLAKE